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SUBJECT: CJCS GEN PACE'S MARCH 23 MEETING WITH PM ERDOGAN

Classified By: CDA Nancy McEldowney for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Turkey continues to support the Iraqi people and coalition efforts, but the PKK, ethnic and religious strife, and Kirkuk remain difficult issues for the GOT, Prime Minister Erdogan told CJCS Gen Pace March 23. Erdogan praised the U.S.-Turkey strategic partnership and hoped the relationship would deepen. Gen Pace appreciated Turkey's efforts in the GWOT -- including in Afghanistan and Iraq -- and told the PM that Iraqi-Turkish-U.S. action against the PKK in Iraq can only happen after the Iraqi government is strong enough to defend itself. End summary.

Erdogan: U.S.-Turkey Partnership Continues...

12. (C) PM Erdogan reviewed U.S.-Turkey strategic relations. He welcomed the resumption of High-Level Defense Group meetings, and noted our two countries have an "efficient" alliance in broad areas, adding that Turkey is pleased that this cooperation is increasingly "enriched and strengthened."

..But Still Many Concerns About Iraq

13. (C) Moving quickly to Iraq, Erdogan expressed concern over ethnic and sectarian violence, and noted that for the first time political leaders in Iraq are talking openly of the possibility of civil war. The PM emphasized that Turkey will continue to contribute to reconstruction and democratization in Iraq. He highlighted five issues which have always been crucial for Turkey in Iraq:

- Iraq's territorial integrity must be maintained.
- No single ethnic group should be permitted dominate the others.
- No single religious group or sect should be permitted dominate the others.
- Iraq's natural resources belong to all its people.
- Kirkuk province should enjoy a special status.

Ankara has consistently stated that these five issues should be enshrined in Iraq's constitution, Erdogan pointed out,

"but we haven't had success in this so far." He hoped the next GOI will consider these points seriously.

14. (C) The PM recounted his government's efforts to encourage Sunni participation in Iraq's elections, then moved to Turkey's material support for Iraq, including provision of petroleum products and electricity, assignment of personnel in Iraq and training for 54 Iraqi officers in Turkey during 2005 under NTM-I (with plans to offer more such training in 2006), overflight clearances granted for OIF flights, and permission for use of Incirlik Air Base for refueling tankers and the multi-directional cargo hub.

PKK Still an Issue

15. (C) Erdogan emphasized that Turkey remains "uncomfortable" with the continued PKK presence in northern Iraq. He warned that the PKK will soon contribute to instability within Iraq.

He said he has personally expressed these concerns to President Bush, Vice President Cheney, and Secretary Rice, but Turkey has seen no concrete action against the PKK in Iraq. This lack of activity encourages the PKK, he averred, and the Turkish public remains concerned. The Makhmour refugee camp in northern Iraq remains under PKK control. The PM asked that the U.S. help to eliminate the PKK presence in the camp and that the camp be closed ASAP. Erdogan welcomed U.S. initiatives to disrupt PKK activities in Europe, but added that the PKK's presence in Iraq is of vital importance for cooperation "between two strategic allies."

Gen Pace: We Appreciate Turkey's Contribution to GWOT

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16. (C) Gen Pace responded that he came to Turkey to listen and to learn how the U.S. and Turkey can remain strong partners. He noted the two countries' strong mil-to-mil relations over the decades, and that these should continue. The Chairman thanked Turkey for its strong support in the GWOT. He recalled that Turkey took the lead in Afghanistan early and has sustained this effort to the great benefit of the Afghan people. Additionally, he appreciated the GOT's assistance for OIF and the Iraqi people.

Chairman: Stability in Iraq Vital Before Dealing with PKK

17. (C) Gen Pace said he understood Turkey's frustration that it has fought the PKK for decades, but the terrorists still operate in northern Iraq. He reaffirmed the U.S.'s firm position that the PKK is a terrorist organization and that we need to take action against them in Iraq. However, we are currently too burdened by ongoing violence in Iraq to carry the additional weight of kinetic action against the PKK. Until we can do so, the USG will continue its efforts in Europe. Our intent is to provide security in Iraq so that the GOI can stand up and defend itself. At that point Iraq, Turkey, and the United States can work together against the PKK.

Erdogan on Terrorism: No Religion, No Territory,
Asymmetrical

18. (C) Erdogan hoped that these vital issues in Iraq are solved as soon as possible so the Iraqi people can live in peace and democracy. He noted that 4000 trucks cross the Turkey-Iraq border every day, and that over 100 Turkish citizens have lost their lives in attacks there, including many who were providing support for U.S. bases there. The GOT hopes that the violence in Iraq will stop, but for now Iraq has become a "playground" for terrorist groups. These groups also can exploit media outlets in the region to get their message out.

¶9. (C) The PM underscored his belief that terrorism has no religion, territory, or region. Today terrorism is international in scope, and the U.S. knows best of all that it is asymmetric, thus making us all vulnerable. Erdogan noted Turkey's dramatic experiences with terrorism, including 30,000 dead in the fight against the PKK, but asserted that Turks feel sorrow for terrorists acts committed anywhere, be in New York, Madrid, Sharm el-Sheikh, or anywhere else. This is the reason Turkish troops serve in Afghanistan and why Turkey's contributions to the GWOT will continue.

CJCS: We Must Work to Accommodate Differences

¶10. (C) Gen Pace agreed with Erdogan's analysis, noting that Iraq is now the "center of gravity" in the GWOT. If we were not in Iraq, he emphasized, we would see the problems we now see in Iraq in Afghanistan instead. Iraq is more accessible to terrorists than was Afghanistan, and thanks to the our coalition in Afghanistan -- including Turkey -- the Afghan people now have a chance to prosper. Furthermore, the Chairman said, if we were neither in Afghanistan nor Iraq, many more of our cities would be under attack.

¶11. (C) Gen Pace thanked Turkey for hosting the March 23-24 symposium on terrorism (at which the Chairman spoke on March 24). Such a conference gives the international community the opportunity to come together and understand where we agree and, more important, disagree, so that we can work to accommodate these differences. Erdogan underscored the importance Turkey assigns to the terrorism issue. He hoped the U.S. and Turkey would continue to expand our CT cooperation, noting the importance of intelligence sharing.

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¶12. (U) CJCS cleared this cable.

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